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DEPT FOR SCA/INSB, SCA/RA, AND INL FOR JLYLE

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SUBJECT: BANGLADESH: DRAFT 2009-10 INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS  
CONTROL STRATEGY REPORT PART I, DRUGS AND CHEMICAL CONTROL

REF: STATE 97228

#### Summary

1. (U) There was no evidence that Bangladesh was a significant cultivator or producer of narcotics. Government of Bangladesh (GOB) officials charged with controlling and preventing illegal substance trafficking lacked sufficient training, equipment, continuity of leadership, and other resources to detect and interdict the flow of drugs. Law enforcement agencies continued to interdict narcotics, from the Golden Crescent in South Asia and the Golden Triangle in Southeast Asia, smuggled into Bangladesh along its porous land border with India and Burma and by fishing trawlers. Corruption hampers the country's drug interdiction efforts. Bangladesh is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention.

#### Status of Country

2. (U) The country's porous borders facilitated the illegal flow of narcotics from neighboring countries and made Bangladesh an attractive transfer point for drugs transiting the region. Assessments conducted by several U.S. agencies in 2008 confirmed numerous land, sea and air border security vulnerabilities in Bangladesh that could be easily exploited by narcotics traffickers. The Bangladesh Department of Narcotics Control (DNC) said it was unable to estimate the number of drug addicts in the country, but unofficial sources estimate between 100,000 and 1.7 million addicts, with 20,000-25,000 injecting drug users and 45,000 heroin smokers.

These estimates indicate by the wide range of the approximation the lack of any real knowledge of the extent of drug abuse. Other drugs used in Bangladesh were methamphetamines, marijuana, and the codeine-based cough syrup phensidyl. Most of the "yaba" circulating in Bangladesh is smuggled from neighboring countries such as Burma.

#### Country Actions against Drugs in 2009

3. (U) Policy Initiatives. Although government officials said in 2007 a new interagency monitoring group had been created, the Home Affairs Ministry said in October 2008 no such agency existed.

4. (U) Law Enforcement Efforts. Law enforcement units engaged in operations to counter narcotics included the

police, the DNC, the border defense forces known as the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), customs, the navy, the coast guard, local magistrates and the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), an elite group that played a leading role in fighting terrorism, corruption and narcotics abuse. Customs, the navy, the coast guard and the DNC all suffered from poor funding, inadequate equipment, understaffing and lack of training. For example, the DNC budget for 2008-2009 was 184 million taka (about \$2.6 million), only slightly more than the actual expenditure for the previous fiscal year. Its work force of about 940 people also was 337 positions short of the number approved by the government. The DNC did not maintain a presence at the international airports in Chittagong and Sylhet and only two officials were posted at Dhaka airport. DNC officers throughout the country were not authorized to carry weapons. Although RAB had become perhaps the highest-profile anti-narcotics force in the country, it did not have a special counter-narcotics section. Its drug-fighting resources, which appeared stronger than other law-enforcement agencies, included a recently expanded canine corps of 51 dogs.

15. (U) The smuggling, diversion and abuse of pharmaceuticals originating from India is considered one of the single largest drug problems in Bangladesh. The BDR seized 14.7 kg of heroin, 9,626.4 kg of marijuana, and 32,870 liters of phensidyl, a codeine-based, highly addictive cough syrup produced in India, from January through September 2009. The DNC keeps tabs primarily on seizures by its own officers. Drugs seized by the department from January through September 2009 (latest statistics) are as follows: 17.6 kg of heroin

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(compared to 29.0 kg in all of 2008 and 20.9 kg in 2007); 1,540.154 kg of marijuana (compared to 2,302 kg in 2008 and 1,768 kg in 2007); more than 46,187 bottles of phensidyl; 83 ampoules of pethedine, an injectable opiate with medical application as an anesthetic; and 3,179 tablets of yaba tablets which consist of caffeine and methamphetamine. Meanwhile, RAB reported 516 drug related arrests as of September 2009.

16. (U) Corruption. The drive against corruption launched by the Caretaker Government in January 2007 slowed following the December 2008 national elections. The Awami League formed the Government following elections, replacing the Caretaker Government. The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) faced criticism from both ruling and opposition party leaders for what they described as "harassment" of politicians during the two years of the state of emergency. The ACC saw a change of leadership and a government review committee recommended withdrawal of 875 cases, mostly involving Awami League leaders, as of October 2009. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina vowed to continue the campaign against corruption. The GOB did not, as a matter of government policy, encourage or facilitate illicit production or distribution of drugs or controlled substances or launder proceeds from their transactions. No senior official had been identified as engaging in, encouraging, or facilitating the production or distribution of drugs or controlled substances.

17. (U) Agreements and Treaties. Bangladesh is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention, the 1961 UN Single Convention as amended by the 1972 Protocol, and the 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances. Bangladesh acceded to the UN Convention against Corruption in February 2007. The GOB and USG signed a Letter of Agreement on Law Enforcement and Narcotics Control (LOA) in September 2002 under which the U.S. provides equipment and technical assistance to the DNC and its central chemical laboratory. The LOA also provided for training, via the U.S. Department of Justice, to law enforcement personnel involved in counter-narcotics activities.

18. (U) Cultivation/Production. The International Narcotics Control Board estimated small quantities of cannabis are

cultivated in Bangladesh for local use. The DNC acknowledged that some small amount of cannabis is cultivated in the hill tracts near Chittagong, in the southern silt islands, and in the northeastern region, claiming it is for local consumption. The DNC also reported that as soon as knowledge of a cannabis crop reached its officers, that crop was destroyed in concert with law enforcement agencies. The DNC said there were no significant crop destruction activities in the first 10 months of 2009.

¶9. (U) Drug Flow/Transit. The most frequently used drug is heroin, thereafter, phensidyl (Codeine based cough syrup) illegally transit from India and the third highest is cannabis. Bangladesh has borders with India on its three sides except the south, which stands on the Bay of Bengal. There were few media reports of major narcotics seizures in the first 10 months of 2009. The International Narcotics Control Board in its 2007 report cited evidence that "heroin consignments destined for Europe are increasingly passing through Bangladesh." It said heroin was smuggled into Bangladesh by courier from Pakistan, by commercial vehicle or trains from India, by truck or public transport from Burma and by sea via the Bay of Bengal. The Chittagong seaport appeared to be the main exit point for narcotics leaving Bangladesh, the report added. Bangladesh Navy officials said they suspected Bangladesh was a transit zone for heroin smuggled out of the Golden Crescent in South Asia and the Golden Triangle in Southeast Asia. Smugglers used Bangladeshi, Burmese and Thai Fishing Trawlers for trafficking heroin into Bangladesh.

¶10. (U) Several recent U.S. government assessments confirmed vulnerabilities along Bangladesh's land, sea and air borders.

One report from the Department of Homeland Security described a chaotic situation at Benapole, the main land border crossing between India and Bangladesh, which could easily be exploited by narcotics traffickers. The report said examination of luggage items was said to be cursory at

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best. Opium-based pharmaceuticals and other drugs containing controlled substances are being smuggled into Bangladesh from India. White (injectable) heroin comes in from Burma.

¶11. (U) Domestic Programs/Demand Reduction. Law enforcement officials believe that drug abuse, while previously a problem among the ultra-poor, is becoming a major problem among the wealthy and well-educated young. The Department of Narcotics Control ran treatment centers in Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Jessore and Comilla. In the nine months through September 2008, 3,120 patients received treatment at the government facilities, the vast majority of them being male. A drug addicts' rehabilitation organization, APON, operates six long-term residential rehabilitation centers, including the first centers in Bangladesh for the rehabilitation of female addicts (opened in 2005 and a more permanent facility in 2009). APON says it is the only organization that includes street children in its drug rehabilitation program. The International Narcotics Control Board in its 2007 report said prescription controls in Bangladesh were not adequately enforced at the retail level. It said pharmaceutical preparations were stolen from both hospitals and pharmacies.

#### U.S. Policy Initiatives and Programs

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¶12. (U) Bilateral Cooperation. The USG continued to support Bangladesh's counter-narcotics efforts. The U.S. Embassy in Dhaka provided a grant of \$52,000 to APON for a new rehabilitation center for female drug addicts, which opened in November 2009.

¶13. (U) The Road Ahead. The USG will continue to provide law enforcement and forensic training for GOB officials, which the USG hopes will be useful to Bangladesh's counter-narcotics efforts. New Delhi-based Drug Enforcement

Administration officials visited Dhaka in November 2009 to liaise with Bangladeshi law enforcement agencies about future counter-narcotics cooperation.

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